The Best Regime Part I:
What Socrates, Plato and Other Great Thinkers Teach Us About the Best Regimes and Their Accompanying Structures

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"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls." This passage from Proverbs 25:28 (KJV) captures the essence of what makes for the ideal foundation of the best regime. That foundation is moral self-mastery that enables each citizen to be self-governing as they then possess the discipline to be ruled by justice. Plato establishes in *The Republic Book II* that the children need to be educated properly with the best stories and books, especially ones that show God in their true light because God is the ultimate authority on being just. Plato holds God as being both good and perfect and as the flawless role model of justice for mankind, not the pantheon of flawed gods that the Greeks worship. Plato confirms this when he says, "And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any causal tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up? We cannot."[1] He continues using Socrates as voice, "God is to be represented as he truly is…And is he not truly good?...Certainly…surely God and the things of God are in every

[1] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 321.

way perfect."[2] When an individual and a society see God as the ultimate authority, they do not settle for compromised role models or half truths to govern themselves by, either individually or collectively as a society. A virtuous citizenry does justice to themselves and to others by obeying the truth and the laws of the land which are based on the justice of a perfect God.[3]

To understand how a virtuous citizen is inspired to act under the accountability of a just God let us first take a look at Socrates who demonstrated the just moral character needed in the best Regime in Plato's *The Apology*. At the threat of being put to death after his trial Socrates boldly states, "...a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether

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[2] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 322-323.

[3] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 324..

in doing anything he is doing right or wrong–acting the part of a good man or of a bad."[4]

Socrates' personal philosophical stance and his urging to his fellow citizens to lead the "examined life" seeking to ponder, question, and pursue virtue over authority, wealth, and power is where true governance begins.[5] He implies by his defense that good leaders should reject the things that bring on corruption and injustice in a state. In *The Apology*, Socrates lives unpaid and unconnected politically so that he can uncover the truth without bias through rational inquiry.[6] His passion for the truth intrigues the youth of Athens who start becoming his disciples which stirs up the ire of those who want their youth to learn their roles

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[4] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 205.

[5] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 210.

[6] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 200-201.

and take their place as the next rulers of Athens.[7] They put Socrates on trial in part for corrupting the youth. Socrates demonstrates his own self-governance in court by refusing to flatter the jury or plead for mercy, avoiding negating his previously extolled virtues he so passionately defended in Athens. Rather, he demonstrated courage, composure under fire and reasoned his defense based on principle. Socrates refuses to conform to an unjust authority and shows a commitment to truth over political convenience and gain. Proverbs 16:32 (KJV) supports the validity of Socrates's behavior even as he faced the wrath of his own society, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit more than he that taketh a city." Ultimately, they condemned him to death.

Socrates affirms that to live the examined life is the only way worth living.[8] I imagine this has been inspiring for those since his time

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[7] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 203.

[8] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 210.

who have felt the pressure of conformance to unjust regime ideologies and systems and have studied the works of Socrates and Plato such as the American Founders, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. For those who make a bold stand for virtue, may say with Socrates, "I know only too well how many are the enmities which I have incurred…the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death of many good men and will probably be the death of many more…"[9] If a man puts his life on the line for his regime can he be happy? Plato says yes.

Happiness is another object of a self-governing citizenry. Plato writes with Socrates as the mouthpiece, "…our aim in founding the State was not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole; we thought that in a State which is ordered with a view to the good of the whole we should be most likely to find justice, and in the ill-ordered State injustice: and, having found them, we might then decide which of the two is the happier. At present, I take it, we are fashioning the happy State…"[10] What keeps a regime happy and focused

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[9] Plato, *The Apology*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 205.

[10] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/

on serving the people justly? Proverbs 28:15,16 (KJV) provides us with some clues, "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days." Plato establishes that wise philosophers should lead the people and that skillful and athletic guardians should stand to protect the people from threats (internal crime and external armies) and to do so in an unselfish manner even forgoing the trappings of excessive private material possessions that are so common among regime rulers.[11] Plato recognized that most princes were tyrants and he held that exceptional kings called Philosopher Kings was the best way to rule the people justly. A Philosopher King could keep and preserve the ideal structure of the state with the best of the warrior guardians. A Philosopher King epitomized by the life of Scorates, was one who could wisely discern truth and present it to others to act on. What then was the perfect regime structure for a

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Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 346.

[11] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 401-402.

Philosopher King and his Guardian class of warriors? Most, if not all regimes, Plato reasoned, could be classified into levels of declining states that had departed from justice. He felt the highest form of government was aristocracy which to him meant the rule of "the government of the best."[12] After aristocracy came other regimes that in the following descending order became less just: 1. Timocracy (the government of honour), 2. Oligarchy (the government of the wealthy), 3. Democracy (government by the desires of the people), 4. Tyranny (rule by one who seizes power).[13] It appears to me that Plato is telling citizens that they should avoid these four forms of government and start making change well before tyranny is upon them.

In conclusion, I give my own thoughts that I find it profound that Plato listed tyranny as being only one step down from democracy. Today in 2025 with about half of the countries in the world being classified as

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[12] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 403.

[13] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 403-415..

constitutional republics, a lot has changed since the Greeks first pioneered democratic government. Greek citizens directly participated in the law making process which helped to later inspire the innovation of the Roman Republic where citizens elect leaders to represent them in government. In turn, the Founding Fathers of America were influenced by Greek and Roman political philosophers which led to another innovation in our modern American Republic. Ironically, many people in America seem to be opposed to our constitutional republic and are demanding that we be a complete or pure democracy. The Greeks learned that a democracy can be rather chaotic, even one step from all out tyranny. Justice can get tossed aside as it did in the case of Socrates' trial and sentencing. Plato warily observes that democracy makes the regime subject to the whims and desires of the poor and that a tyrant develops by forming a party that is against the rich. The tyrant is the one who transfers wealth from the rich to the poor to secure his power permanently if he can.[14] It is interesting to note that we have such conditions in the United States today which indicates that we are on the

[14] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 7, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), https://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabritannicagreatbooksofthewesternworld/Encyclop%C3%A6dia%20Britannica%20-%20Great%20Books%20of%20the%20Western%20World%2C%20Volume%207%20-%20Plato/page/200/mode/2up, 414..

brink of tyranny. Truly, Socrates and Plato make it clear that both citizens and the regime have to be just for virtue and happiness to flourish in society. Will the United States continue to choose virtue, justice and self-governance? Time will tell.

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